A Taste of "Nextopia": Exploring Consumer Response to Advertising for Future Products

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A Taste of "Nextopia":
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Abstract

This paper investigates consumer response to advertising for future, to-be-released products. Drawing on recent consumer psychology research on the optimism bias, positive uncertainty and affective (mis-)forecasting we explore consumers' positive bias for "the next product." A first experimental study of responses to car ads investigates how advertising the same product before versus after release has significant, favorable effects. Future-oriented advertising evokes greater elaboration and stimulates more positive evaluations of both ads and brands. The second experimental study replicates and extends these findings with mineral water ads for both familiar and unfamiliar brands. The third study rules out limited availability as a competing explanation and extends the findings by including a time lag and actual product consumption.

Around 5:00 p.m. in the evening of June 29, 2007, thousands of people stood in line outside a New York City store. They were lined up to buy the iPhone, which would be released one hour later. This was a product that, at the time and before sales had even begun, had generated more than 70 million Google hits, testifying to the massive, global interest. The iPhone was revealed as the highest-ranked mobile phone among U.S. consumers in a survey conducted two months *before* the launch, with a score significantly higher than the phones consumers currently owned. The launch of the iPhone is a perfect example of what we call "Nextopia"—that is, a general belief among consumers that the next product always will be the better one. We argue that there is a strong and consistent bias for future products and that increased knowledge of this bias may provide firms with important guidelines on how to manage marketing communication and product launches.

While the iPhone success can be attributed, in part, to the extensive media coverage it received, we believe that there is also a lesson to be learned from the tactics and success of the iPhone launch that challenges traditional marketing communication knowledge. Although there is general agreement that products should be advertised as closely as possible to potential purchase occasions (e.g., Dahlén and Nordfält 2004), Apple began touting the iPhone six months before its release and long before any potential purchase occasion. Furthermore, although most studies focus on how and when to communicate a product *after* its release (e.g., Cannon, Leckenby, and Abernathy 2002; Franses and Vroomen 2006), the iPhone was predominantly communicated *before* the release. We argue that this advance communication contributed to the product's huge success. We apply this notion specifically to advertising and suggest that "Nextopia advertising"—marketing future products before their release—could have positive effects on consumer response overall, producing greater interest

in and more positive evaluations of both advertisements and brands. Although prior research has examined product preannouncements, to our knowledge, our investigation of consumer responses to advertising for to-be-released products is the first of its kind. Previous studies have focused on how and why companies should preannounce to gain competitive advantages from a management or microeconomics perspective (e.g., Bayus, Jain, and Rao 2001; Eliashberg and Robertson 1988; Robertson, Eliashberg and Rymon 1995; Wu, Balasubramanian, and Mahajan 2004), but little attention has been paid to investigating consumer responses to advertising for preannounced products.

We base our notion of Nextopia effects on previous research conducted on three interrelated concepts in consumer psychology—namely, the optimistic bias, positive uncertainty, and affective forecasting. First, research on the optimistic bias in psychology finds that, in general, people tend to be unrealistically optimistic about their future (McKenna 1993; Tanner and Carlson 2008; Weinstein 1980). This optimistic bias stems from both biased beliefs about the future and images (fantasies) depicting future events (Oettingen and Mayer 2002). For example, consumers tend to believe that they will take much better care of their next car (versus their current car), and they may indulge in vivid fantasies about their future dream car. Because consumers are unrealistically optimistic about their own future consumption behavior, they also likely overestimate the value of future products. Thus, they might have a bias toward forthcoming, over current, products. With regard to positive uncertainty, recent research indicates that when positively framed, uncertainty may yield more pleasure than certainty (Lee and Qiu 2009; Wilson et al. 2005). Studies in the context of lucky draws and loyalty reward programs have shown that people do derive pleasure from uncertainty (e.g., Lee and Qiu 2009). That is, when people do not know exactly what they might win (or even have won), they tend to elaborate more on the experience and therefore enjoy it more and

evaluate it more favorably. Similar effects have been uncovered for movie trailers, for which spectators are left uncertain about the specific content and resolution of the movie (Wilson et al. 2005). Building on this notion of positive uncertainty, Bar-Anan, Wilson, and Gilbert (2009) suggest that uncertainty makes unpleasant events more unpleasant and pleasant events more pleasant. In consumer settings, uncertainty may be prominent in situations ranging from potential prizes in lucky draws to prospects of a forthcoming new product. The more radically new a product is perceived, the greater are the promised benefits, but also the perceived uncertainty (Alexander, Lynch, and Wang 2008). Last, research on affective forecasting suggests that consumers tend to overestimate the impact and duration of future (positive) events (Ebert, Gilbert, and Wilson 2009; Wilson, Wheatley, Meyers, Gilbert and Axsom 2000). Not only do people hold erroneous beliefs about how experienced utility changes over time (Loewenstein 1987), but recent research also suggests that they may experience affective misforecasting because they fail to incorporate largely *correct* beliefs at the moment of choice (Wang, Novemsky, and Dhar 2009). Thus, when people consider their next car, they not only overestimate the impact and duration of the happiness they will experience when buying the car but also tend to forget how quickly that happiness wore off when they bought their previous car.

Building on these three concepts and adopting the findings to the context of marketing communication, we expect advertising for a future product to produce greater (positive) uncertainty than advertising for a current product. Similar to a movie trailer, advertising before a product's launch should encourage people to elaborate more on how the product will actually materialize and derive pleasure from doing so. Furthermore, we expect the future time perspective of the advertising to evoke optimism bias and affective (mis)forecasting, so that consumers anticipate greater use and enjoyment of the brand.

Testing the notion that advertising products before (rather than after) their release produces (more) positive effects on advertising and brand evaluations, we present three studies. The first study compares advertising for a future versus current (mock) car model and confirms the proposed hypotheses. The second study replicates the findings for a different product (mineral water) and extends over both unfamiliar and familiar brands. The third study rules out competing explanations from limited availability and investigates the actual consumption experience of the product.

The findings contribute to explaining recent phenomena such as the iPhone and "Chinese Democracy," a studio album of rock band Guns N' Roses that was announced in 1994 and released in 2008. Recall that Apple preannounced the iPhone six months before its release, during which the value of Apple's stock more than doubled and stock prices soared. By the same token, Axl Rose of Guns N' Roses made a lucrative franchise and toured the world several times under the banner of the (continuously) forthcoming "Chinese Democracy" album for 14 years. The future certainly has a value today, which Sorescu, Shankar, and Kushwaha (2007) demonstrate with their finding that preannouncements of forthcoming products among technology firms increased one-year abnormal returns by more than 14%. With the current research, we hope to shed light on how advertising for future products can be an important vehicle for capturing Nextopia value by stimulating favorable consumer evaluations.

NEXTOPIA: INFLATED ANTICIPATIONS OF THE NEXT PRODUCT

Think of the previous car you bought – how excited, happy and satisfied does it make you feel right now? Now, think of the next car you will buy – how excited, happy and satisfied does

that make you feel right now? Although you may derive some excitement, happiness and satisfaction from thinking of your previous (current) car, you most likely feel more excited, happy and satisfied thinking about the next one. In a pilot study among 345 business students, we found that exact result, except we asked participants about a more personally relevant event (i.e., their next date). On a scale from 1 to 10, excitement with the previous date averaged 6.76, whereas the next date averaged 8.29 ($t = 6.20$, $p < .01$). In addition, the differences between happiness and satisfaction were 6.86 versus 8.27 ($t = 8.61$, $p < .01$) and 6.97 versus 8.18 ($t = 5.71$, $p < .01$), respectively. The same patterns emerged in tests of several other events, in which we compared, for example, the current versus the next school project and various leisure activities.

The pilot study illustrates people's taste for Nextopia—that is, for the exciting, happy, and satisfying next event that always remains in the future. When comparing future events with past and present events, people seem to agree that "the next one will be the best one." To cope with the inherent uncertainty of the future, we believe that people elaborate more and are more optimistic about what is to come, thereby forming a more enjoyable and favourable perception of the event. Therefore, we expect Nextopia advertising—advertising for a future (rather than current) product—to be processed more extensively and the advertised brand to be perceived more favorably.

Processing Future-Frame Advertising

Consumers tend to view the future as more uncertain than the present (Kahneman, Knetsch, and Thaler 1991; Samuelson and Zeckhauser 1988). They also typically prefer certainty over uncertainty (Wilson et al. 2005), and the usual reaction to uncertainty is to try to reduce it. Following this logic, Grant and Tybout (2008) measured consumers' use of information about

brand extensions and found that greater uncertainty (primed by a future time frame) led to the use of more comprehensive information in their product evaluations. Applying these findings to advertising, we would expect advertising for a future product to be processed more extensively than advertising for a current product because the former has more uncertainty:

H1: Advertising for a future product evokes a greater number of thoughts than advertising for a current product.

Although people may believe that they prefer certainty over uncertainty, recent research suggests that when positively framed (as is the case for most advertising), uncertainty may actually yield more pleasure than certainty. Wilson et al. (2005) found that winners in a lucky draw experienced more positive and longer-lasting feelings when they were not immediately told which of two prizes they had won. They dubbed this the "pleasure paradox": When consumers do not fully understand positive events, they derive more pleasure from them. Subsequent studies have shown that people also derive greater pleasure from not being certain which of two prizes they have won than from being certain about winning *both* prizes (Kurtz, Wilson, and Gilbert 2007). When faced with uncertainty (rather than certainty) associated with a positive event, consumers appear to experience greater and longer-lasting positive feelings (Lee and Qiu 2009). By the same token, research conducted in the context of feature films showed that people who saw a movie clip that did not reveal the movie's ending elaborated longer on the movie afterward and enjoyed the clip more than those who saw the same clip including the ending (Wilson et al. 2005).

We expect to find results analogous to these previous findings when we investigate advertising for future products. Similar to a movie trailer, we frame advertising for a

forthcoming product as a positive future event with some uncertainty, on which consumers would enjoy elaborating. The enjoyable experience should translate into more positive attitudes toward advertising for a future product. We also suggest that consumers should perceive the advertising as more credible. On the one hand, this may seem counterintuitive because advertising claims for a future product cannot, by definition, be verified by the consumer. On the other hand, consumers' judgments of ad credibility are, in essence, a result of weighing their own pro- versus counter arguments (e.g., Raju, Unnava, and Montgomery 2009), and we expect that consumers will elaborate more, and more favorably, on advertising for future products. In other words, advertising for future products should produce relatively more pro than con arguments. Thus, we hypothesize that consumers will evaluate Nextopia advertising more favorably because they will like it better and perceive it as more credible:

H2: Advertising for a future product is evaluated more favorably than advertising for a current product.

Anticipating the Nextopia Product

Whatever people's actions, from picking an ice-cream flavor to going on a date, they engage in affective forecasting—that is, the meaning they anticipate or their forecast of how their decisions and choices will make them feel (Patrick, MacInnis, and Park 2007). To a large extent, people's choices are based on their forecast feelings (Shiv and Huber 2000). Affective forecasting tends to have a particularly positive effect on choices because people generally overestimate both the magnitude and the duration of the feelings they anticipate (Wilson and Gilbert 2003). That is, when people believe that the (un)happiness and (dis)satisfaction they derive from, for example, buying a new car will be great and long lasting, these feelings should play a major part in their decision.

According to our pilot study, in which people experienced greater excitement, happiness, and satisfaction when thinking of future rather than past or current events, we expect that advertising for future products will induce more positive feelings than advertising for current products. This expectation is in line with the recent optimism bias literature.

Optimism bias is a form of self-positivity bias and implies that people are overly positive about their own future. Demonstrating this bias, Zhang, Fishbach, and Dhar (2007) conducted a study of students' exercise and diet habits and found that they systematically overestimated their future commitment and achievements. Regardless of the students' previous behaviors, they always estimated that they would do better. In an extension of this study, Tanner and Carlson (2008) found that when people plan their future exercise regimen, they expect that they will behave ideally: Participants' answers were the same regardless of whether they answered the question that began with "in an ideal world" or "next week." Tanner and Carlson concluded that when predicting future behavior, consumers selectively, but unwittingly, test the hypothesis that they will behave ideally. Similarly, recent studies on new product introductions show that people tend to underestimate any obstacles or difficulties and are optimistic about their abilities to adopt new products (e.g., Alexander, Lynch, and Wang 2008; Castano et al. 2008).

Thus, Nextopia advertising should evoke an optimism bias because it provides consumers with a future time perspective, prompting them to view their use of the product through a more positive lens. We expect that advertising for future products will produce more positive forecast feelings than advertising for current products:

H3: Advertising for a future product leads to more positive forecast feelings than advertising for a current product.

Because forecast feelings tend to guide consumers' actions, they should influence consumers' evaluations of the advertised brand and, most notably, their purchase intentions. Furthermore, the higher (idealized) usage and expected utility of the future product should affect the perceived quality of the product. Support for this notion can be drawn from Meyvis and Cooke's (2007) study, which found that consumers systematically devalue their current choice of store when anticipating future choices. Meyvis and Cooke conclude that forward-looking customers tend to selectively test the hypothesis that their current choice can be improved. In other words, their findings could be interpreted as a general expectation that future products will be better than present ones.

Accordingly, we expect that advertising for future products will produce more positive brand evaluations than advertising for current products. First, as consumers inflate their anticipated enjoyment of the future product, purchase intentions should increase. Second, the anticipated enjoyment should favorably affect the product's perceived quality, as should the general expectation that future products are better than present ones. Thus, we hypothesize the following:

H4: Advertising for a future product leads to more positive brand evaluations than advertising for a current product.

Next, we report three experimental studies. The first study tests the main effects of our hypotheses. The second study replicates the main effect, extends the tests to another product

category, and includes both familiar and unfamiliar brands. The third study rules out limited availability as a competing explanation, extends the test with a time lag, and adds actual product consumption as a dependent variable.

STUDY 1

In Study 1, we manipulated time frame (current vs. future) as a between-subjects factor in an experiment in which we exposed participants to otherwise completely identical ads. We used a new car model as the advertised product. Cars are consumer products that typically are preannounced, which suggests ecological validity and applicability for the test. This study explores whether an advertisement in which the car model is presented as forthcoming is evaluated more favorably than an advertisement in which the car model is presented as currently available.

Stimuli and Procedure

We used print ads as stimuli in the test because they are reader paced and allow for variations in processing. To avoid confounding effects of previous consumer knowledge, the sender was masked (i.e., the lower-right-hand corner, where the brand logo appeared, was blurred) and the ads did not contain any visual of the car. The ads contained a picture of two men and two women in white laboratory coats facing the camera; the copy text read: “Not your usual car engineers. Not your usual new car.” For our manipulation, we included a third sentence: “Test drive it now” (current product) versus “Test drive it in 2009” (future product). The study was conducted in October 2008.

Sixty-six undergraduate business students (38 females, 28 males) from a major Swedish university were recruited during a break in one of their classes (with the incentive to win a

book about creativity, unrelated to our topic of inquiry, by one of the authors) and were randomly assigned to the two conditions. Participants were simply informed that this was a study of consumer opinions about various products and told to take as much (or as little) time as they wanted to view the ads. When finished with the ads, they completed a questionnaire containing the dependent variables. After completing the questionnaire, they were asked what they thought was the purpose of the research. None of the participants correctly identified the purpose of the study. Next, they were debriefed.

For all three studies we report herein, we conducted the experiments in Sweden with Swedish participants. We used two knowledgeable English–Swedish translators to translate all copy texts and questionnaire items to and from English.

Measures

To assess processing (H1), we measured ad-evoked thoughts. More specifically, participants were asked to write down their spontaneous thoughts when immediately reacting to the advertisement and to offer as many (or as few) thoughts as they wanted, without time limit. At the end of the questionnaire, they were instructed to go back to the thought protocol and, for each thought, indicate whether it was positive (“”+”), negative (“-“), or neutral (“0”).

For the test of H2, we used two measures of ad evaluations (answers were recorded on a seven-point semantic differential scale). We measured ad attitude with the three items “good/bad,” “pleasant/unpleasant,” and “favorable/unfavorable,” producing an averaged index where Cronbach’s $\alpha = .95$. We measured ad credibility with the three items “convincing/unconvincing,” “believable/unbelievable,” and “biased/unbiased,” producing an averaged index where Cronbach’s $\alpha = .87$.

For the test of H3, participants were asked to rate how they thought having the advertised product would make them *feel*. We recorded ratings of the three items "excited," "happy," and "satisfied" on a seven-point Likert-type scale (anchored by 1 = "completely disagree" and 7 = "completely agree"). For simplicity, we averaged them into an index (Cronbach's $\alpha = .80$).

For the test of H4, we used two measures of brand evaluations (answers were recorded on a seven-point Likert-type scale). We measured purchase intention with the three items "interested," "will try out," and "want to buy," producing an averaged index where Cronbach's $\alpha = .90$. We measured brand quality with the three items "high quality," "good product," and "better than the average," producing an averaged index where Cronbach's $\alpha = .89$.

Results

First, we performed a multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) on all the dependent variables simultaneously, with gender as a covariate ($F = 2.54$, $p < .01$). Our manipulated time frame (current vs. future) had significant effects on all the dependent variables ($F(7, 66) = 4.36$, Wilks's $\lambda = .88$, $p < .01$). Next, we used planned contrasts to compare the mean values between conditions and to test each hypothesis individually (see Table 1).

Place Table 1 about here

In testing H1, we found that the future condition produced a significantly greater number of ad-evoked thoughts than the current time condition ($M_{future} = 4.14$ vs. $M_{current} = 3.27$; $p < .01$).

Thus, H1 is supported: Advertising for a future product evokes a greater number of thoughts than advertising for a current product.

For the test of H2, we compared both ad attitude and ad credibility between conditions to investigate whether future time frame would enhance ad evaluations. Ad attitude was significantly more positive ($p < .01$) in the future time condition ($M = 3.99$) than in the current time condition ($M = 3.47$), and we found the same pattern for ad credibility ($M_{future} = 4.04$ vs. $M_{current} = 3.54$, $p < .01$). Thus, H2 is supported: Consumers evaluate advertising for a future product more favorably than advertising for a current product.

In testing H3, we compared the mean indexed forecast feelings between the manipulated time frames. The test revealed that consumers had significantly more positive feelings ($p < .01$) in the future time frame condition ($M = 4.29$) than in the current time frame condition ($M = 3.62$). Thus, the results support H3: Advertising for a future product leads to more positive forecast feelings than advertising for a current product.

To investigate whether a future time frame produces more favorable brand evaluations (H4), we compared perceived quality and purchase intentions between the conditions. Perceived quality was significantly higher ($p < .01$) in the future time frame condition ($M = 4.47$) than in the current time frame condition ($M = 3.94$), as was purchase intention ($M_{future} = 4.02$ vs. $M_{current} = 3.51$, $p < .01$). Thus, the results support H4: Advertising for a future product leads to more positive brand evaluations than advertising for a current product.

In addition to the hypothesis tests, we tested the notions that the more favorable ad evaluations associated with future-oriented advertising would be partly mediated by an

increased number of thoughts (as we discussed previously for H2) and that more favorable brand evaluations would be partly mediated by more positive forecast feelings (as discussed previously for H4). We employed Sobel's test, which compares the raw coefficient of the mediating variable (when it is included in a regression together with the independent variable) with the raw coefficient of the independent variable (taken from a regression in which the mediating variable is not included) to produce a z statistic (Sobel 1982). Table 2 displays the raw coefficients and standard deviations for the tests.

Place Table 2 about here

As Table 2 reveals, the increased number of thoughts mediated the positive effect of the future time frame on ad evaluations. Ad-evoked thoughts mediated the positive effect of future-oriented advertising on both ad credibility ($z = 1.94$, $p < .05$) and ad attitude ($z = 1.92$, $p < .10$), though to a lesser extent. Similarly, forecast feelings mediated the positive effect of the future time frame on brand evaluations, both in the form of perceived quality ($z = 1.94$, $p < .05$) and purchase intention ($z = 2.03$, $p < .01$).

Discussion

Study 1 suggests that Nextopia advertising has positive effects on both ad and brand evaluations. In other words, according to the results, it is more effective for firms to advertise products before their release than after their release. The future time frame invites more consumer elaboration and makes the advertising both more credible and likable. Furthermore,

Nextopia-induced consumers associate the product with more positive feelings and, consequently, perceive it to be of higher quality and are more inclined to purchase it.

We chose cars as the product for Study 1 because they would provide ecological validity to the test. However, cars are often preannounced, and this might also pose a problem. Through experience, consumers may expect car manufacturers to preannounce their new models, and thus some may perceive the future time frame as a standard. Furthermore, because the category is high-tech, again from experience, consumers may expect forthcoming models to be more advanced than existing models, raising the question whether our findings are due to a category-specific effect. To remedy this, we conducted Study 2 in a different product category.

STUDY 2

For Study 2, we chose mineral water as the product category for two key reasons. First, it differs significantly from cars; it is a low-tech product category with high purchase frequency. Within the mineral water category, new products have traditionally not been preannounced. Second, the product introduction rate is fairly high, providing ecological validity to the test. Furthermore, with the high introduction and purchase rates, consumers would not have experienced noteworthy advances in product quality between purchase intervals.

In addition, to further enhance realism, we tested effects not only with a masked product but also with a revealed, existing brand. Because part of our argument builds on the benefits of uncertainty (associated with a future time frame), we wanted to determine whether these benefits are attenuated when a potential element of certainty is introduced in the form of a well-known brand.

Procedure

We employed a 2 (time: current vs. future) × 2 (brand: masked vs. revealed) between-subjects design. We used the same procedure as in Study 1, in which we recruited 129 undergraduate business students (78 female, 51 male) from two major Swedish universities during breaks in their classes (with the incentive to win one of the authors' books); we then randomly assigned them to one of the four manipulations. After completing the questionnaire, participants were asked what they thought the study's purpose was and later debriefed. None of the participants correctly identified the purpose of the study.

Similar to Study 1, we employed print ads for the test. The ads contained a close-up of water drops on an unidentified glass bottle. The copy text read: "Not your average water." For our manipulation of time, we included a second sentence: "In stores now" (current product) versus "In stores in 2009" (future product). The study was conducted in October 2008. In the revealed manipulation, the brand name and logo (of the market leader) were featured in the lower-right-hand corner (in the masked condition, they were blurred). The measured variables were identical to Study 1.

Results

We conducted a MANCOVA on all the dependent variables simultaneously, with gender as a covariate ($F = 2.44$, $p < .01$). Our manipulated time frame (current vs. future) produced significant effects on all the dependent variables ($F(7, 129)=6.94$, Wilks's $\lambda = .91$, $p < .01$). However, whereas the brand condition produced a significant main effect ($F = 4.76$, $p < .01$), the time frame × brand condition interaction term was not significant. Separate MANCOVAs for the two brand conditions produced similarly significant effects of the time frame factor.

Therefore, for the sake of simplicity and clarity, we pooled the two brand conditions together in planned comparisons (see Table 3).

Place Table 3 about here

As Table 3 reveals, the future time frame generated a significantly greater number of ad-evoked thoughts (M_{future} = 4.79 vs. $M_{current}$ = 3.58, $p < .01$), in support of H1. Similar to Study 1, the effect can be attributed to a significant difference in positive thoughts. In support of H2, the future time frame also produced more favorable ad evaluations, both in the form of ad credibility (M_{future} = 4.86 vs. $M_{current}$ = 4.11, $p < .01$) and ad attitude (M_{future} = 4.60 vs. $M_{current}$ = 3.90, $p < .01$).

We found effects similar to Study 1 in the tests of H3 and H4 as well. In line with H3, the future time frame evoked more positive forecast feelings (M_{future} = 4.96 vs. $M_{current}$ = 4.33, $p < .01$), and in line with H4, brand evaluations were more favorable, both in terms of perceived quality (M_{future} = 5.40 vs. $M_{current}$ = 4.78, $p < .01$) and purchase intentions (M_{future}= 5.11 vs. $M_{current}$ = 4.49, $p < .01$).

When we repeated Sobel's mediation test, we again found support for the notion that a greater number of generated thoughts mediated the positive effect of future time frame on ad evaluations ($z_{credibility}$ = 2.49, $p < .01$; $z_{attitude}$ = 2.05, $p < .05$). Similarly, the test revealed that the more positive forecast feelings mediated the positive effect of future time frame on brand evaluations ($z_{perceived\ quality}$ = 2.78, $p < .01$; $z_{purchase\ intention}$ = 2.34, $p < .05$).

Discussion

Study 2 corroborates the results from Study 1 and extends the findings into another product category. Even for a less technologically advanced and more frequently purchased product, advertising with a future time frame elicits more favorable evaluations of both the ad and the brand than advertising the same product after its release.

Notably, we found that this conclusion holds for both a masked brand and a revealed brand. That is, the introduction of an element of certainty, in the form of a well-known brand, did not attenuate the effects of the uncertainty associated with a future time frame. Typically, advertising tends to have less effect on well-known brands because the ad has a smaller, incremental effect on people's (established) perceptions of the brand and there is less need to learn about the brand from the advertising. However, as Grant and Tybout's (2008) findings also suggest, an uncertain future time frame may urge people to process the existing information more thoroughly. Thus, although a future time frame for an unfamiliar brand may evoke more thoughts in the form of speculations about the product, it may also invite closer scrutiny of the advertising and existing information for a familiar brand.

Our contention that a future time frame produces positive effects on ad and brand evaluations rests on the pleasure paradox and optimism bias as conceptual foundations. However, we cannot rule out limited availability as a competing explanation. Because a future product is less available than a current product, scarcity and/or reactance effects could occur. For example, Eisend (2008) recently showed that scarcity appeals in advertising (phrased as "limited availability") enhance value perceptions and purchase intentions. Similarly, Fitzsimons (2000) found that consumers may react to the unavailability of a product (caused

by a stock-out) by inflating their preferences for it. To rule out limited availability as a competing explanation, we conducted Study 3.

Furthermore, we test whether the positive effect of a product's "future status" spills over to evaluations of the actual product when it later achieves "current status." Whereas previous research (Nowlis, Mandel, and McCabe 2004) has uncovered positive effects of anticipation on consumption (i.e., a delay between the purchase of a product and its consumption enhances consumption enjoyment), we investigate nonanticipated consumption (i.e., consumption after merely having seen an ad) of a future product when it is made available.

On the one hand, we could speculate that when the product changes status to "current," the Nextopia effects should fade and the product should become less attractive. As a result of this, one could even argue that, according to the expectancy disconfirmation framework, biased positive expectations of a future product could have negative effects on consumers' post-consumption evaluation of the product. However, as Braun-LaTour and LaTour (2005) illustrate, consumption experience tends to be subjective, and advertising can have a forward-framing effect that, in advance, shapes consumers' perceived experiences of a product. Similarly, Phillips and Baumgartner (2000) found that high expectations had a positive effect on consumers' experiences of the performance of a product, thereby automatically reducing the likelihood of expectancy disconfirmation. Building on these findings, we hypothesize that seeing future-oriented advertising in advance will frame the consumption of the actual product so that it is evaluated more favorably:

H5: Advertising for a future product leads to more positive consumption evaluations than advertising for a current product.

STUDY 3

In ruling out limited availability as a competing explanation, Study 3 compared responses to advertising for a future product with those to advertising for a current, but unavailable product. In an additional test, we compared the effects of future versus current product status on actual consumption of the product after a one-week delay.

This study employed a 2 (future vs. current, unavailable) × 2 (immediate measurement vs. delayed consumption) between-subjects design. A total of 111 undergraduate business students (58 female, 53 male) from two major Swedish universities participated in the experiment; they were recruited in a fashion similar to the previous two studies.

Procedure

We used the same print ads as in Study 2, with one exception: For the "future status" manipulation, the last sentence read "In stores soon." The brand was masked, and for the manipulation of unavailability, the last sentence of the ad read "In stores now," but participants were informed verbally by the survey administrator that the mineral water was not available in any of the local stores and that they would not be able to buy it. The participants were randomly assigned to the two experimental conditions. Half the participants filled out the questionnaire in the same session they were exposed to the ads (immediate measurement). The other half did not fill out a questionnaire in the same session and merely were asked to process the ad (it was included in another experiment in which participants were questioned about other ads). Instead, they were approached in class one week later (by a research assistant that was not present during the first session, and was seemingly unrelated to

that study) and invited to a taste test of the mineral water for which they had seen the advertisement the previous week. The cover story stated that the company wanted to test people's taste preferences in this area to find out whether there would be a market for this, not yet available, product. After tasting, the participants filled out a questionnaire. Measures were identical to the previous two studies, with two exceptions in the delayed, postconsumption measurement: First, this measurement did not include ratings of the advertising. Second, for the test of H5, participants rated the taste of the mineral water on a scale from 1 ("poor") to 5 ("excellent").

Results

We performed two separate MANOVAs, one for the immediate measurement and one for the delayed, post-consumption measurement. Our manipulated time frame (future vs. current, unavailable) produced main effects on the dependent variables in both the immediate measurement ($F(7, 62)=5.94$, Wilks's $\lambda = .90$, $p < .01$) and the delayed, postconsumption measurement ($F(4, 49)=3.21$, Wilks's $\lambda = .83$, $p < .01$). Table 4 displays the results from the planned comparisons.

Place Table 4 about here

As Table 4 reveals, participants exposed to the future time frame condition generated significantly more thoughts than those exposed to the current time frame condition, even when the latter were informed that the advertised product was unavailable ($M_{\text{future}} = 4.22$ vs. $M_{\text{current, unavailable}} = 3.47$, $p < .01$). Similarly, the future time frame produced more favorable ad evaluations in the form of both credibility ($M_{\text{future}} = 4.19$ vs. $M_{\text{current, unavailable}} = 3.65$, $p < .05$)

and attitude (M_{future} = 4.47 vs. $M_{current,\ unavailable}$ = 4.01, $p < .05$). Forecast feelings (M_{future} = 4.55 vs. $M_{current,\ unavailable}$ = 4.02, $p < .01$) and brand evaluations, in the form of perceived quality (M_{future} = 4.99 vs. $M_{current,\ unavailable}$ = 4.60, $p < .05$) and purchase intention (M_{future} = 4.70 vs. $M_{current,\ unavailable}$ = 4.22, $p < .01$), were also higher in the future time frame condition.

When we tested participants' perceptions of the mineral water after they had tasted it, we found that the advertising manipulations produced significant effects. Participants who were exposed to the future-oriented advertising reported more positive feelings after they took the taste test one week later than those who were exposed to the advertising for a current, but unavailable product ($p < .05$). Thus, the results support H5: Advertising for a future product leads to more positive consumption evaluations than advertising for a current product. The group exposed to the future-oriented advertising was also more inclined to purchase the product ($p < .05$). However, the difference in taste ratings between the two groups was not statistically significant ($p < .10$).

Discussion

In Study 3, we ruled out limited availability as a competing explanation for our uncovered positive effects of a product's "future status" on ad and brand evaluations. The immediate measurement, which was given to participants directly after exposure to the stimuli, revealed that advertising the product as forthcoming evoked a greater number of thoughts, more positive feelings, and more favorable evaluations of the ad and the brand.

Moreover, the delayed, postconsumption measurement revealed that the advertising may even frame the actual consumption of the product. Rather than inducing expectancy disconfirmation with negative evaluations of the actual consumption, Nextopia perceptions

evoked through advertising for a future product spilled over onto the experience of the actual product when it was later consumed. When comparing responses after consumers had tasted the mineral water, we found that those previously exposed to Nextopia advertising experienced more positive feelings and evaluated the brand somewhat more favorably.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

In a series of studies, we set out to explore consumer response to advertising for future products to determine whether it produces Nextopia, that is, a lure of the perfect next product. All three studies suggest that biased expectations exist. Tests in two product categories, both unfamiliar and familiar brands, provide evidence that advertising the same product before its release, rather than after its release, produces positive effects on evaluations of both the ad and the brand. While our investigation focused specifically on advertising, we believe that the positive effects on product evaluations would be applicable to other forms of communication as well, and could, for instance, shed some light on the huge (prerelease) success of the iPhone and on a phenomenon such as Guns N' Roses perpetually forthcoming "Chinese Democracy" album, which both received massive attention in many forms before their releases. The findings also contribute to the explanation of why product preannouncements have become so prevalent and impactful in the past few years (e.g., Sorescu, Shankar, and Kushwaha 2007): Consumers seem to be systematically biased to view forthcoming products as general improvements over currently available products, even when there are no factual claims to support such expectations.

We extend the recent consumer psychology literature on the pleasure paradox (e.g., Wilson et al. 2005) to discuss how the future is construed as a positive uncertainty that, in itself, may

generate elaboration and pleasure and, in turn, how this elaboration and pleasure can be used in advertising to make it both more credible and likable. Our studies show that advertising a product before it even exists, and thus before claims can be verified by consumers, leads consumers to perceive the product as more credible. We suggest that the explanation for this paradox lies in the receiver's self-persuasion; that is, future-framed advertising evokes greater elaboration, which in turn represents a greater part of the input on which the receiver bases his or her judgment, and nothing is more reliable than one's own thoughts (Raju, Unnava, and Montgomery 2009).We also found that the greater number of evoked thoughts can be attributed to an increase in positive thoughts. This is in line with the recent literature on the optimism bias (Zhang, Fishbach, and Dhar 2007). We extend the notion to include not only a person's own future behaviors but also his or her anticipation of advertised future products.

In finding that future-frame advertising has positive effects, we also add a new insight to the media scheduling literature. Although the debate continues about the optimal number of exposures (e.g., Cannon, Leckenby, and Abernethy 2002), there seems to be more or less consensus that the advertising should be scheduled as closely as possible to the purchase occasion (e.g., Dahlén and Nordfält 2004), and focus has been on already-released products (e.g., Franses and Vroomen 2006). Based on findings reported here, we would advise marketers to consider prelaunch advertising as well.

Using arguments from the existing media scheduling literature, we could argue that advertising before the product is attainable would be wasteful because memory for advertising deteriorates quickly (e.g., Chessa and Murre 2007) and may suffer competitive interference from subsequent advertisers. However, adopting arguments from the market signal literature, we could conversely argue that such "wasteful" advertising functions as a signal of the

sponsor's confidence in the product. Such signal effects have previously been uncovered for excessive advertising repetition (Kirmani 1997) and excessive advertising creativity (Dahlén, Rosengren, and Törn 2008). Advertising before the sponsor can even sell the product may send a similar signal. Furthermore, Study 3 revealed that advertising may shape perceptions so that a future frame may make the product more enjoyable to consume than its current competitors, after it is available.

Managerial Implications

The main advice from our findings is that advertisers should seriously consider prerelease advertising of their products. Conventional wisdom holds that one should have something to say/sell (i.e., an existing product) before communicating; otherwise, the advertising will not be credible and will not translate into sales. However, our studies show that prerelease advertising does not need be less credible; rather, it can be just the opposite. Prerelease advertising could possibly also present an opportunity to position the product as superior, creating interest and purchase intentions in the ever increasing competitive landscape of current products.

Still, advertisers should take into consideration that consumer memory often is short lived. Therefore, we would expect that marketers still need to remind consumers of the previous advertising after the product is released. However, because of the enhanced elaboration evoked by the advertising for future products, we would also expect less advertising effort to be required during this phase. Though we did not actually test effects on actual sales, we would suggest that companies may find it profitable to a larger extent to incorporate preorders and presales into their business models. Corroborating this notion, best-selling films and albums on itunes.com are often not yet released.

The focus of our research was on consumer response, but future research should also take competitor response into account; a potential, negative effect of preannouncing a product is alerting competitors to respond, thus possibly reducing the product's uniqueness and superiority in the marketplace after launch. We call for future research to investigate the hypothesis that advertisers should not provide too much information about the product in the preannouncement but rather (similar to the ads employed in our studies) be fairly vague. Not only do we hypothesize that such vagueness would make it more difficult for competitors to catch on, it could maybe also reduce the likelihood that consumers believe that the product did not live up to its promise of Nextopia after launched.

Limitations and Further Research

Further research should qualify our fundamental finding that a future time frame produces a positive main effect on perceptions of the advertised product. One question that arises is how this kind of advertising affects current products. Using the iPhone as an example, we might expect the positive perceptions of the future product (iPhone) to spill over onto the sender's (Apple's) other, current products by way of assimilation. Conversely, as Meyvis and Cooke's (2007) study of repeated store choices suggests, we might also expect current products to become less attractive when compared with a future, Nextopia product. This brings us to a second question: How would the taste of Nextopia differ depending on the distance of the future? On the one hand, a more distant and abstract future should be more attractive. On the other hand, if the future becomes too abstract, it might not invite much elaboration (as previous findings have suggested on the positive role of visualization on product evaluations, e.g., Zhao, Hoeffler, and Dahl 2009). Further research could employ construal level theory

(Trope and Liberman 2003) to make predictions and test the time frame effects of advertising forthcoming products.

Finally, although this research was a first investigation of consumer response to preannouncements, its disadvantages are that we used student samples and investigated only two product categories. Thus, it could be argued whether students (who have a greater portion of their lives ahead of them) would assess the value of the future relatively higher than the average (older) consumer. Furthermore, although cars and mineral water cover a wide span of products, they share the common feature that quality and consumption experience is to some degree subjective, and thus they leave room for uncertainty. Further research should examine whether, for example, financial services, whose quality and consumption experience are less subjective and uncertain, would produce the same effects. In addition, our test ads were relatively sparse in terms of information; more informative and detailed advertising could leave less room for Nextopia effects to materialize. In conclusion, we encourage replications of and extensions into other participant samples, product categories, and advertising designs.

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TABLE 1

Study 1: Results and Mean Values

	Future time frame	**Current time frame**	η^2	***p***
Ad-evoked thoughts	4.14	3.27	.23	.0012
Ad attitude	3.99	3.47	.09	.0078
Ad credibility	4.04	3.54	.09	.0099
Feelings	4.29	3.62	.12	.0054
Perceived quality	4.47	3.94	.11	.0060
Purchase intention	4.02	3.51	.11	.0063

***F*(7, 66) = 4.36, Wilks's λ= .88, *p* < .01**

TABLE 2

Study 1: Regression Coefficients and Sobel's Mediation Test

Dependent variable	**Independent variable (s.d.)**	**Mediating variable (s.d.)**	**z**	***p***
(Thoughts mediator)				
Ad credibility	.68 (.15)	.36(.17)	1.94	.049
Ad attitude	.53(.17)	.39(.16)	1.92	.086
(Feelings mediator)				
Perceived quality	.50(.14)	.46(.20)	1.94	.049
Purchase intention	.41(.11)	.39(15)	2.03	.028

TABLE 3

Study 2: Results and Mean Values

	Future time frame	**Current time frame**	**η^2**	***p***
Ad-evoked thoughts	4.79	3.58	.19	.0053
Ad attitude	4.86	4.11	.10	.0088
Ad credibility	4.60	3.90	.11	.0085
Feelings	4.96	4.33	.14	.0064
Perceived quality	5.40	4.78	.11	.0086
Purchase intention	5.11	4.49	.09	.0097

***F*(7, 129) = 6.94, Wilks's λ = .91, *p* < .01**

TABLE 4

Study 3: Results and Mean Values

	Future time frame	**Current, unavailable, time frame**	**η^2**	***p***
Immediate measurement				
Ad-evoked thoughts	4.22	3.47	.21	.0024
Ad attitude	4.47	4.01	.08	.049
Ad credibility	4.19	3.65	.10	.045
Feelings	4.55	4.02	.12	.0089
Perceived quality	4.99	4.60	.08	.049
Purchase intention	4.70	4.22	.11	.0098
***F*(7, 62) = 5.94, Wilks's α = .90, *p* < .01**				
Post-consumption measurement				
Feelings	4.26	3.81	.16	.036
Perceived quality	4.75	4.40	.07	.049
Purchase intention	4.22	3.60	.08	.048
Taste	4.11	3.86	.05	.099
***F*(4, 49) = 3.21, Wilks's λ = .83, *p* < .01**				